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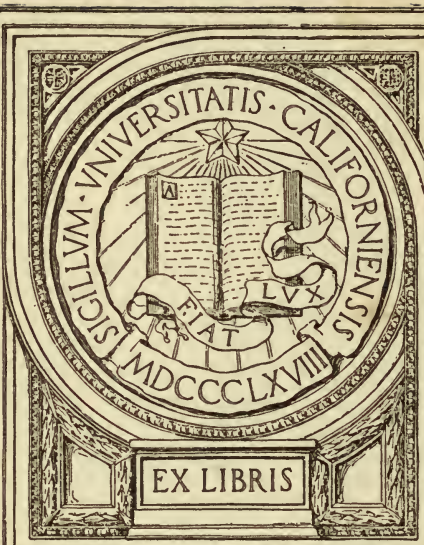

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FRANK SHAY - - NEW YORK

THE STAGE GUILD PLAYS NO. 4

THREE WISHES

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT BY
THOMAS WOOD STEVENS

FRANK SHAY . . . NEW YORK

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THE THREE WISHES was first produced by THE HUT PLAYERS, American Army Post 731, (Neufchateau, France,) A. E. F., October 9, 1918, at the Y. M. C. A. hut, with the following cast:

CARNEY ..... William B. Van Riper
BUCKS ..... Frank Tillman
SIMPERSON ..... L. L. Derby
JIM ..... Clifford B. Halvorson
LIEUTENANT ..... Ernest Bolam

SCENE: An Army Billet Somewhere in France.

Produced Under the Direction of William B. Van Riper

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COMPLETE LIST OF PLAYS UPON REQUEST

(*Somewhere in France, Carney, Bucks and Simperson, Privates, are playing poker; from time to time, Jim, the Shine, ministers to their wants. As the curtain rises, Carney, who already holds most of the matches (or beans, as the case permits) is looking over his hand confidently; Simperson's expression is judically immobile, Bucks openly disconsolate. On the draw, the expressions change; Bucks brightens, and Carney looks serious. Betting, Bucks puts up half his remaining pile. Simperson, who is dealing, passes, and Carney raises Bucks.*)

CARNEY. I hate seeing you so reckless, Bucks.

BUCKS. (*in a slow, Southern voice*) Yes, you do.

CARNEY. Well, I do. I hoped this game would last out the evening. But the evenings are so plaguey long, and you and Simp. are so damn reckless—

BUCKS. There's the rest of my pile. I got a hand this time. (*Carney covers the bet.*)

CARNEY. Lay 'em down. (*The cards are laid on the table.*)

They're all mine. (*He reaches out and gathers in the winnigs.*)

BUCKS. Well, would you believe it? Three aces looked mighty good to me.

CARNEY. *Tres-bein*—what next? You, Simperson.

SIMPERSON. (*Shaking his head slowly*), Out of court.

CARNEY. Come up, Bucks—come up.

BUCKS. No good talking to me. Three aces, too.

CABNEY—(*To Jim*). Jim. Jim, what can you find for a guy that seems to have cleaned out the place?

JIM. More of the same, I reckon.

CARNEY. That all?

JIM. That's all, boss.

BUCKS.—(*Still studying the three aces.*) I know now what did it to me. I touched Jim with my left hand.

SIMPERSON. What are you mystifying about, Bucks? You touched Jim with your left hand?

BUCKS. It's bad luck to touch a darkey with your left hand, when you're playing poker. I knew it was bad luck, but I'd forgotten that I did it. I never would have put up my last centime on those aces, if I'd remembered.

CARNEY. Jim, what's this he's growling about?

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JIM. Luck, Mister Carney. He hain't got no such luck as you, but he knows all about it. He's dead right, too.

SIMPERSON. What do you mean—he's dead right?

JIM. About touching a colored person with your left hand.

BUCKS. No use trying to explain it to you, Simp. But it's true. Jim knows more about luck than you'll ever learn. He's one of those boys—but it's no use talking to you. You wouldn't get it.

SIMPERSON. What sort of a fool hocus pocus are you putting up, anyway?

BUCKS. I tell you, you wouldn't understand it.

SIMPERSON. Well, I've watched what Carney did to you, and I don't want to understand it. It's no good, that's plain. But I'd like to know what you're talking about.

BUCKS. All right. Jim, come here.

CARNEY.—(*Clearing for a new game.*) New game—new bank.

BUCKS. It's no game. Do you think I'd sit in a game with Jim? I just want to show you something. Jim, have you got any bones in your pocket?

JIM. What do you want to know for, Mr. Bucks?

BUCKS. Show these gentlemen what you can do, Jim.

JIM. Go 'long with you, Mister Bucks.

BUCKS. Look here, you black shine—haven't I lost twenty francs on your account tonight? Dig up those bones.

(*Jim fumbles in his pockets; for a moment it appears that the bones are lost, but at last he produces two.*)

Make it three, boy.

(*Jim looks up protestingly, but Bucks insists; the third dice comes out, Jim grinning and shaking his head.*)

Now show the gentlemen what you can do. They don't believe in luck—in—you know what I mean, Jim. (*Jim rolls the dice tentatively on the table.*)

JIM. She's working strong tonight, Mister Bucks.

CARNEY. Come along! What's the confidential?

SIMPERSON. Give us your demonstration, Louisiana.

JIM. I wants three sixes. I wants three sixes. (*He rolls the dice. The others look on carelessly, then with sudden interest.*)

CARNEY. Got 'em, by Heck!

SIMPERSON. Let me look at those dice. (*He examines them carefully, testing and rolling them.*)

Can you do it again?

JIM. I wants three sixes. I wants three sixes. (*He rolls them; the others look in amazement at the throw.*)

She's workin' mighty strong tonight.

CARNEY. Now wouldn't that crimp you?

SIMPERSON. That's a remarkable throw. Do you know how many thousand chances there are against repeating a throw of three faces? By the laws of chance—

BUCKS. You may know something about the laws of the land, back in the States, Simp., but you don't know anything about the real laws of chance. Jim does; they all do.

JIM. They ain't many that can do as much as what I can, when she's workin' strong, boss.

SIMPERSON. I believe you're right, Jim. Anybody that can just call for one throw in fifty thousand, and get it—(*Carney shuffles the cards.*)

CARNEY. Play some more, boys?

SIMPERSON. I'm flat, Carney—and so's Bucks. You might play a hand with Jim.

JIM. I'm willin', boss. I'm good tonight.

CARNEY. I guess not, Shine.

SIMPERSON. Wise work, sonny.

CARNEY. What's the use anyway? I win a lot of this crinkley stuff, and there's nothing in this man's country to do with it after you get it. If it were real, honest-to-God United States money now—and a man could go along Broadway—

SIMPERSON. Shut up about money, and all the rest of that, Carney. I've had enough of it. Besides—

CARNEY. Well—

SIMPERSON. Look here, Jim, I want to know—

JIM. Laws, boss, if you want to know how to get her workin' strong, I can't tell you nothin'. You have to feel when it's so, and there's few white folks—mighty few—

CARNEY. Yes, and there's few white men that could lick Jack Johnson. But what of it? *Pas de quoi.* Most of us don't want to try.

SIMPERSON. Don't butt in, Carney. What about it Jim? I'm strong for this stuff. Three sixes twice, just by saying the words—

JIM. There's lots of words I could say, Mister Simperson—

BUCKS. I advise you not to start anything, Simp.

CARNEY. Oh, come now, Buckie. That's what we came for —to start something. You talk like the new Lieutenant.—

SIMPERSON. Now, Jim, what do you mean—words you could say?

JIM. Did you gentlemen—I ain't preferrin' the question to Mr. Bucks now, you understand—did you gentlemen ever hear of a Virgo Doctor?

SIMPERSON. I've heard of a Voodoo, if that's what you mean.

JIM. Some folks call 'em that, but 'tain't the right name. Right name's Virgo Doctor. They're the people what can get her goin' strong, now and again.

SIMPERSON. Now look here, Jim, I'm broke, but I'm good for ten francs on this, if you can pull something special.

JIM. I wouldn't do it for money, nohow. And I wouldn't like to get you gentlemen in bad with no officers—

SIMPERSON. You won't. Bucks and I are safe, and nothing you can do would put Carney in worse with the new Lieutenant—

CARNEY. For the love of Heaven, Simp., let me forget him for a minute—

SIMPERSON. Go to it, Jim.

BUCKS. Now understand, fellows—I'm not in on this.

SIMPERSON. All right. Bucks is out. Now, Jim.

JIM. I'll take this table cloth, if you don't mind. (*He drapes the table cover around him, and takes up the candle.*) And I'll put out the light. (*He pauses.*)

You—you won't forget about them ten francs, Mister Simperson? (*Simperson nods. Jim stands for a moment looking straight before him; then he blows out the candle and begins a sing-song chant.*)

Are you there—are you near me—are you close in the dark, in the air? Are you there?

I's a-callin'—I's a-callin'—I's a-callin'.

Can you hear me? I's a-callin'. Are you near me? I's a-callin'.

If you're near me are you touchin' me? Am I touchin' you?

For I'm puttin' out my hand—I'm puttin' out all my fingers— I'm puttin' out my fingers in the dark toward you.

For the power of the darkness—for the Virgo of the night I'm stretchin' out my hand.

I'm reachin' out my hand and I'm sayin' in my heart all the words I got to say—all the words I got to say, in my heart.

Do you put your hand in mine? Do you leave me cryin' lone in the night?

Now I feel the breath—now I feel the breath—now I touch the hidden hand. Now the ring is on my finger. Now the river's flowin' over me—flowin' over me. Now I's come to Virgo—now I's still again—now I's still.

I's touchin' for luck on his left shoulder, for the wish that must be fulfill'. Now I's touchin' on the right shoulder for the second wish. Now I's touchin' on his head—on his head for the third wish.

Virgo—Virgo—Virgo, now I's touched him—Virgo listen—Virgo listen—Virgo listen till he calls you!

(*At the words, he has touched Carney on the shoulders and on the head. There is a pause as he finished the chant; then he twitches off the table cloth, dropping on his knees by the table and covers his faces in his hands, crying out.*)

Light the light! For the Lord's sake, light the light!

SIMPERSON.—(*in a hushed voice*)—What does that mean, Bucks?

BUCKS.—(*lighting the candle*)—I don't know. He touched Carney for three wishes.

SIMPERSON. What was all that, Jim?

JIM. Don't ask me Mister Simperson—don't ask me.

SIMPERSON. Does it mean that Carney gets his wish, three times?

JIM. Mebbe so, but don't ask me. Lord forgive me—don't ask me. I never did feel her workin' so strong.

SIMPERSON. Try it, Carney. What do you wish?

CARNEY. You know well enough what I wish.

SIMPERSON. Don't say you want to go home.

CARNEY. Oh, I don't camouflage it. I've been a private ever since I joined the army—with no chance at all. I wish the same thing every day I get up in the morning.

SIMPERSON. I get you.

BUCKS. Well, you don't behave like it.

CARNEY. I've lost patience, that's all. I wish I was out of the ranks—any way, at all, but out of the ranks. (*There is the commotion of men coming to attention outside, and a voice is heard inquiring for Carney.*)

Hang it all, it's the new Lieutenant. (*Enter the Lieutenant. The men scramble to their feet.*)

THE LIEUTENANT. Carney.

CARNEY. Yes, sir.

THE LIEUTENANT. You have some knowledge of French?

CARNEY. A little, sir.

THE LIEUTENANT. So the Major said. He had only your word for it, I believe, but he is making you a sergeant, and detailing you specially. Your warrant is waiting at headquarters. You are to take a squad at once and go out after horses. You will cover the towns and villages listed here, starting from the village of Dubois-sur-cote. A motor truck is moving immediately. Get your stuff and be ready. You will be the only man in the detail who speaks French, and you will be expected to buy horses to the best possible advantage, picking them up wherever you can find them. Report back to Dubois-sur-cote in five days.

CARNEY. You say we start tonight, sir?

THE LIEUTENANT. At once. I've been a long time locating you, so I advise that you report to the Major immediately. You know where the camion starts?

CARNEY. Yes, sir.

THE LIEUTENANT. And you know where Dubois-sur-cote is?

CARNEY. I'll find it, sir.

THE LIEUTENANT. Very good. I may tell you frankly, Carney, the Major has confidence in you. More than I have, I'm afraid. You have everything?

CARNEY. Yes, sir.

THE LIEUTENANT. Good night. (*The Lieutenant goes out, leaving Carney staring at his movement order.*)

CARNEY.—(*Reading*)—Sergeant Carney and eight men.

SIMPERSON. Well, I'll be damned! Jim, I owe you ten francs.

BUCKS. Don't take it too seriously, Simp.

SIMPERSON. Well, it's mighty weird, just the same.

CARNEY. Weird—I should say weird. The truck's waiting in the rain, and me off for five days with a squad that knows I've just been raised, trying to buy horses from Frenchies on what French I know. Weird—it's looney, to put it mild.

SIMPERSON. But you said you wished—

CARNEY. Yes, I said I wished—and at that very moment the Lieutenant was stalling around with his instructions, pretending to try to locate me. It was all decided before we started the game tonight. I've seen the Major have his eye on me a lot lately. It's just co-incidence—but I'm the victim. And it all comes of my putting up a bluff about knowing French—saying "*Tres bien*," and "*Voulez vous.*"—

BUCKS. Now, Carney, I wouldn't be too sure—

CARNEY. Well, I am sure. That's the trouble with us—all of us. Bluff. And look what it gets you into! Look at the responsibility! Think of me with that detail. More than likely half of them know more French than I do. And they won't admit it. They'll bluff and stall, and leave it all up to me. And we'll sleep in stables for a week—stables in France! Have you tried 'em? Have you even sniffed 'em at long range?

BUCKS. I can guess what they're like.

CARNEY. Sure you can. You can guess from any village you pass through. They were cleaned out just before the battle of Waterloo, and they've been ripening ever since, just for me and my detail. And we'll come back in five days on crow-baits that can hardly haul their ragged hoofs out of the mud. Buy horses—with French money! If I bought Joe Patchen's full brother for fifty francs, that Lieutenant would growl at me. I'm the unluckiest guy—

SIMPERSON. Don't say that—didn't you get your wish?

CARNEY. Yes, and don't I wish I hadn't? I wish I was back where I was, that's what I wish. (*Re-enter the Lieutenant.*)

THE LIEUTENANT. Carney, I gave you certain orders for immediate execution. I didn't expect you to rise to your opportunity. I wasn't surprised when you didn't. The work couldn't wait, so the Major has made other arrangements. Your appointment as sergeant has been cancelled. There will be no other punishment, this time, but I hope the matter will make some impression on you, for your own good. Let me have that movement order. Good night. *Exit the Lieutenant.*)

SIMPERSON. Now say that's co-incidence, will you?

CARNEY. No, but I wi—(*He is about to say he wishes, when Simperson puts his hand over his mouth.*)

SIMPERSON. Be still now. Whatever you think you want to say, don't say it. Let's get at the facts here, if we can.

BUCKS. You won't get any facts. Take my advice, and forget all about it.

CARNEY. Or go as far as you like—it's all on me.

SIMPERSON. Be quiet now. This may be very important. There's no use wasting a great chance, just because it is a chance.

CARNEY. I'll be quiet. Spill it.

SIMPERSON. Here we are, we three in France. It's all a gamble—it's a gamble if we get home—or if we don't. And what we do here is a gamble. Well, now, here we see this shine Jim throw three sixes twice. Chance? Perhaps. But he called for them, and they came. I don't pretend to understand it, but it gets me. He sing-songs some nonsense with the light out, and touches Carney for three wishes. Now we know Carney's lucky. But he wishes twice, and each time the thing happens. Always by natural means—maybe so. If he wished something unnatural, the voodoo would most likely shake him. Now the point is—he's got one more wish coming.

CARNEY. Well, I wi—(*Again Simperson gags him.*)

SIMPERSON. Now don't do anything till you hear from me. First, let's find out if Jim knows how far the voodoo'll go.

BUCKS. (*Incredulously.*) I've known folks before trying to find out things like that.

SIMPERSON. Jim.

JIM. Yes, boss.

SIMPERSON. Would your voodoo take notice of a hypothetical question—or a hypothetical wish?

JIM. That sounds pretty good, boss, but I don't know. I ain't never tried no hypoflutical wish on her.

CARNEY. What's the use being so dead sober about it, Simp?

SIMPERSON. Because it may be mighty sober business. It might mean a lot to you, and to me, and to all of us. It might mean a lot to the A. E. F.

CARNEY. Well if I should wi—(*He stops himself.*) We'll say if I should mention—just mention—our whipping the Boches, would the voodoo take any interest?

JIM. I don't know. She wouldn't do nothin' 'cept about you yourself, Mister Carney—I know that.

CARNEY. It's for me myself, personally, this—mention, we'll call it?

JIM. Just for yourself, personally, Mister Carney.

SIMPERSON. Now go slow, Carney. I don't know what you're thinking. It's a chance—a great chance, but it must seem to come naturally, and it must come through you alone —you son of luck.

CARNEY. Jim, can you tell me how far this voodoo'll go? What'll he do for me?

JIM. There ain't no tellin' what she'll do, boss—ain't no tellin'.

SIMPERSON. Very careful, now, Carney. Don't you so much as think of wishing anything until we get it all figured out. For, however improbable it is, it must seem to happen by natural means. That's evidently the way the thing works.

BUCKS. You boys are monkeying with a buzz saw. I warn you—

SIMPERSON. So there's no use in figuring anything too miraculous.

CARNEY. I might mention being given a commission.

SIMPERSON. Didn't I say we must avoid the miraculous?

CARNEY. Well, I tell you the Major has his eye on me.

SIMPERSON. He won't have when the Lieutenant gets through. Whatever you do—and it may be something mighty big—you must do as a private. Now I'm trying to figure out what's the biggest thing a private can get away with.

BUCKS. They say a private captured a German Major General up at Chateau Thierry.

CARNEY. Well, I ain't that tender hearted.

BUCKS. And a private of engineers set off a mine up in the Arras front that blew up a whole—

CARNEY. Yes, and where did he light? Not for me!

SIMPERSON. Well, if you'll let us work it out—

CARNEY. No you don't. You've worked out enough to

show your slant. I'm goin' to work it out now. You listen to me.

SIMPERSON. We'll listen, but see that you don't say the word "wish." See that you don't even think it.

CARNEY. Quit butting in. If there's anything in this at all, it's just as likely to be something big. Nothing's too big for a voodoo. Now here's what I'll do: first, I'll get transfered to Aviation. Nothing impossible about that. Now say I make good at the flying game. I can ride anything on four legs, and lots of these French stallions are harder to stick on than a plane. I say Aviation, because the stunt must be one that I can pull off alone. Now, here's the voodoo's chance. I get a plane. I go up. I make a landing behind the Boche lines—

SIMPERSON. Don't do that. Do you know how hard it is to crank one of those engines again, alone?

CARNEY. Leave that to me. I've got a scheme for that. Well, now, I'm over back of the Boche lines. I've got my little double barrelled machine gun. I settle quietly beside a road. It's up to the Voodoo. Now along come two large grey automobiles. I turn loose with my gun. I get everybody in the first car, including the dummy. I get everybody in the second car except one party; he's an oldish party, with a stiff left arm, and he understands English perfectly. I invite this party over to my plane. Major General, huh! My oldish party is still under my gun, mind you. And I say to him, "Bill, get busy with that propeller—we're going up." Pretty good, no? *Tres bon,* yes? You'll run this for me, will you? You'll scheme it all out, will you? If I'd let you talk, you'd be talking yet. As it is, it's as good as done. Lordy I'm dry—I wish I had a drink. (*Jim instantly sets three mugs on the table.*)

JIM. Here you are, Mister Carney. You was wishin' for a drink. (*Carney starts violently, seeing what he has done. The other two see it also, and rise abruptly, their mugs in their hands.*)

SIMPERSON. You damn fool!

BUCKS. (*At the same time with Simperson.*)—Carney! (*Both swing their mugs at his head; Carney ducks, and is drenched with drinks and broken earthenware, as—*

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